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SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR EUR/SCE AND EUR/RPM; DEFENSE FOR OSD

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SUBJECT: ROLE OF PROPOSED NATO OFFICE IN MONTENEGRO

REF: (A) PODGORICA 231 (B) PODGORICA 251 (C) PODGORICA 254

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11. (SBU) Summary: Establishment of a NATO office in Podgorica will facilitate intensified, practical cooperation between Montenegro and the Alliance. NATO can reap tangible benefits quickly, for example, expediting the deployment of Montenegrin military units to ISAF and sharing information on regional security. Secondary benefits would include assisting the GoM in prioritizing and implementing its partnership obligations and helping build public support for NATO membership. The Ministry of Defense is eager to host a NATO team and has offered to contribute a fully furnished office, in-country transportation, and staff for translation and administrative support. The Montenegrin Parliament's adoption of a law authorizing participation in international peacekeeping operations has opened the way for the GoM to make a significant contribution to NATO. End summary.

INTENSIFIED, PRACTICAL COOPERATION

12. (SBU) A NATO office in Podgorica, depending on its configuration, could carry out a range of tasks that would advance NATO and U.S. interests. In addition to points in Ref A, the GoM has shared with us its vision for the functions that could be carried out by a NATO office based in Podgorica. Montenegro is now the only non-invited country in the region lacking a NATO presence on the ground. This limits cooperation and communications between the GoM and the Alliance. However, an in-country NATO office could guide concrete Alliance-related activities, to include:

a) Overseeing the ground-based lines of communication (GLOC) established under the Transit agreement.

b) Helping with preparation and certification of Montenegrin forces deploying to NATO peacekeeping operations, including ISAF,

The GoM has already committed to deploying a three-person medical team to ISAF in February 2009 as part of a Macedonian hospital unit and plans to rotate its personnel every six months. Likewise, in cooperation with DoD, the GoM is preparing a platoon-sized infantry contingent for possible deployment to Afghanistan within a year. Because these are Montenegro's first NATO deployments, the NATO certification process and administrative arrangements for executing these missions could prove challenging. Both would be facilitated significantly if NATO personnel were in Podgorica.

c) Facilitating the exchange of classified information between NATO and Montenegro,

Once the GoM implements its NATO Security Agreement (expected next month), it will be in a position to exchange operational and other data with NATO. In view of Montenegro's commitment to participate in NATO operations, the exchange of relevant data both before and during deployments will take on increased significance. While Montenegrin intelligence capabilities are still modest and focused primarily on the region, the GoM possesses unique capabilities that have proven valuable in the past. NATO in-country personnel, fully engaged with their Montenegrin counterparts, could help ensure a high quality and complementary exchange of information.

ADDED BENEFITS OF BUILDING MONTENEGRO'S PARTNERSHIP

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AND PUBLIC SUPPORT

¶4. (SBU) Montenegro's political will to join NATO is no longer in question. Not only has the GOM leadership publicly and repeatedly stated its commitment, but it has taken an important step forward with a parliamentary majority now backing this policy (Ref B). As one of the newest and smallest states in Europe, however, Montenegro's democratic institutions face a major challenge in navigating the complex process of NATO accession. A NATO office in Podgorica could help the Montenegrin leadership prioritize and implement its partnership activities in order to accelerate and strengthen the country's relationship with the Alliance, for example:

d) Assisting Montenegro in identifying, participating in, and hosting PFP exercises.

e) Helping the GoM through the annual PARP process.

f) Providing regular feedback to the GoM on its progress and areas for improvement.

¶5. (SBU) Apart from the issues faced by other transitional democracies in readying themselves for NATO, the GoM faces the

challenge of advocating Montenegro's membership in NATO against the backdrop of the 1999 NATO intervention here. A NATO office could play an important role in building public support for NATO by:

g) Advising the GoM on implementation of its NATO Communications Strategy, drawing on the experiences of other countries that have seen increases in public support for NATO.

h) Facilitating visits to NATO headquarters, other facilities, and/or NATO operations or exercises by military and non-military opinion makers.

i) Conducting direct public outreach to local audiences.

MONTENEGRO'S OFFER TO CONTRIBUTE

16. (SBU) The GOM is enthusiastic about the concept of a NATO presence in Podgorica. It has already sent two formal requests to NATO headquarters and is taking every opportunity to promote the idea during interactions with NATO officials. Senior MoD officials have told us that the GoM is prepared to offer furnished office space in the Ministry (including computers and other office equipment); staff for translation and administrative support; and vehicles for in-country transportation.

17. Comment: In the last two weeks, the GoM has demonstrated clearly its commitment to joining NATO and the EU. On October 3, the Parliament passed a resolution endorsing Montenegro's pro-NATO policy. The Parliament then voted to authorize Montenegrin participation in international peacekeeping operations (Ref C). Finally, on October 9, the GoM announced its decision to recognize Kosovo. The establishment of even a modest NATO presence in Podgorica will send an important signal

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encouraging the GOM to continue on its Euro-Atlantic path, despite resistance from the pro-Belgrade opposition. End comment.
MOORE